

ARTS EDUCATION

Lame Deer students (from page 1)



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The arts are central to A+ Schools

The A+ Schools Program in North Carolina is the largest, longest running, most successful arts-based whole-school reform effort in the nation.

Since 1995, A+ Schools has been using the arts as a catalyst for creating connections and making schools engaging, meaningful and enjoyable places to teach and learn.

The A+ Schools Program is a whole-school reform model that views the arts as fundamental to teaching and learning in all subjects.

A+ Schools combine interdisciplinary teaching and daily arts instruction, offering children opportunities to develop creative, innovative ways of thinking, learning and showing what they know. In A+ Schools, teaching the state's mandated curriculum involves a collaborative, many-disciplined approach, with the arts continuously woven into every aspect of a child's learning.

Learn more at www.aplus-schools.ncdcr.gov.

"I really appreciate how you're watching me, with a big smile, making it happen," Parker told the 13 musicians, one who is an alternate. "Very nice!"

The students have only been playing the Shona African-style marimbas for a semester. In the fall, they studied art with instructor Susan Wolfe.

Parker said she chose the instrument linked to an African tribe, as well as the African drums, because they mirror the Northern Cheyenne culture.

"I wanted to expand the world-view of these kids," said Parker, in her second year at the school. "And what other culture has a strong history of dance, of singing and of drumming? It's a perfect fit."

This isn't the first time Parker has turned to marimbas to engage students. She had a marimba band for eight years at a school in eastern Washington, and saw the interest the instruments could generate.

When Parker first came to Lame Deer, none of her students in grades five through 12 had ever had formal music education. When she tried to get them to move and sing, she got a lot of passive noncompliance.

So she wrote a \$10,000 grant with one of the Turnaround Arts partners, the National Association of Music Merchandisers, and NAMM gave her the money to buy the marimbas. The percussion instruments have made all the difference.

"When I say 'hey, grab your sticks and drums and let's play,' boom, they're ready to go," Parker said. "They're begging me to play."

She believes music and the other arts have made a difference in the past two years.

"The kids come to school more often," she said. "They smile. When I first came here, the first two months, I did not see a single smile. It was like the kids had the weight of the world on their shoulders."

Playing music, she said, is a way to let kids be kids and release pent-up energy.

"They're always told to sit and be quiet," she said. "This is 'get up, let's move.' It's fun."

Even better for Lame Deer, when the school was invited to perform in the talent show, NAMM agreed to help the school find a set of marimbas to play at the White House. When it couldn't find any, the organization agreed to buy a new set and then, once the show is over, ship them to Lame Deer.

Parker plans to place the new instruments in the elementary school, for the fifth- and sixth-graders.



Natalie Parker conducts the Morning Star Marimba Band in the music room at Lame Deer Junior High prior to their performance at the White House. (Photo by Larry Mayer, courtesy of Billings Gazette)

"We can be marimba crazy here now," she said. "I'm just so grateful for all of the help we've had and so proud of the kids because they rock."

At the start of Turnaround Arts, each of the schools was paired with arts professionals. In Lame Deer, retired New York City ballet dancer Damian Woetzel and three musicians, members of the Silk Road Ensemble under the artistic direction of cellist Yo Yo Ma, came to work with the students.

Over two years, Woetzel visited the school three times and the musicians came twice, each time for two-and-a-half days, said Wolfe, who helped write the grant for Lame Deer to participate. Their time at the school included teaching student workshops, building relationships, and by the visit's end, putting on a performance open to the community in which some students took part.

Like Parker, Wolfe, who has sparked an interest in art among her students, has seen positive things come out of the partnership.

"There's a lot of relationships being built along the way here, and that's kind of the idea, to build partnerships with people we can sustain," Wolfe said.

Student art now decorates many areas of the school. It's something the community has noticed and enjoyed.

Although the two years of the initiative are coming to an end, Lame Deer will get continued help, but to a lesser degree, Wolfe said. For instance, in the fall, Silk Road Ensemble wants to team up with Lame Deer and a Turnaround Arts school in Boston to do a project about rivers.

After two years of mentoring by the arts

professionals, Wolfe said she has seen the youth much more open to new experiences.

"I see kids developing their self-esteem, their self-confidence," she said. "They're stepping up where they used to curl up and want to disappear."

Seventh-grader Wendy Spang, one of the marimba players, said the instrument was new to her when she stepped in Parker's class in January.

"It's different," she said. "It comes from a different country and it makes a noise I've never heard before."

She said she'd like to take up the clarinet next year.

Seventh-grader Wade Walksalong said it feels "awesome" to be representing the tribe in the talent show. Playing the marimbas takes a team effort, he said.

"It's like we're all coming together as one, not just playing our parts," he said.

Wade, who'd also like to learn to play the piano, figures he'll keep playing the marimbas next year. He admits he's kind of nervous to ride on an airplane, but he knows where he wants to go in D.C.

"The Lincoln Memorial," he said. "'Cause I've always wanted to go there since I was a little kid."

Although the talent show formally marks the end of Lame Deer's full participation in Turnaround Arts, the program itself will continue and grow next year, said Rachel Goslins, executive director of the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities.

"We're going to be expanding to significantly more schools over the next three years," she said.

She called Turnaround Arts "an experiment that has really succeeded beyond our wildest dreams."

The initiative has been uneven and slow in places, but it's been consistent, she said, with higher attendance and fewer discipline problems. Lame Deer has struggled somewhat because of the turnover in administrators over the past two years.

Goslins praised the work of Wolfe and Parker and other teachers who have helped keep the program on track. She said those who have worked with Lame Deer have "fallen in love with teachers and kids and the community, so it's been meaningful for us to be there."

She's noticed one big change in the school over two years.

"Just physically, when you walk into the school, it looks different, it feels different," she said.

National Core Arts Standards launched

By Emily Kohring
Director of Arts Education

This past June, after collecting input from over 6,000 educators and artists and culling through over one million comments submitted during three different draft reviews, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) published the National Core Arts Standards on a new, interactive website, found at www.nationalartsstandards.org.

The National Core Arts Standards now include a total of five artistic disciplines. In addition to music, theatre, dance and visual art, the new standards include media arts as its own distinct artistic discipline, recognizing the role technology now plays in how every art form is practiced and taught.

Jonathan Katz, executive director of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, pointed out at a launch webinar on June 4 that one strong benefit to having a set of national standards is that it gives arts educators a common language to describe what students should know and be able to do in the arts, and it helps make the case for the importance of



artistic literacy as another way that children can learn.

Noted arts education researcher Dr. James Catterall added that arts standards also create "an expression of intention and purpose" for arts education advocates, making the arts important alongside other subject matters.

The new standards are organized by a set of four overarching anchor standards, followed by discipline-specific performance standards, broken down by grades. The four anchor standards describe artistic processes that apply to all the disciplines: creating, performing (referred to as presenting in visual

arts and producing in media arts), responding and connecting.

In addition to allowing users to organize the standards in different ways, the website also hosts instructional support resources, including Model Cornerstone Assessments for each discipline, enduring understandings and essential questions for each standard, and glossaries and additional resources teachers can utilize in their classrooms.

Adoption of the National Core Arts Standards by each state is completely voluntary. Some states are already in the process of adopting or adapting the standards, and some states will keep the standards they have.

Montana educators have been involved in the draft review process for the National Core Arts Standards since spring of 2013 and have offered both individual and collective feedback to the NCCAS. When the time comes to revise Montana's Standards for Arts, a broad coalition of Montana citizens invested in education will likely take a look at the National Core Arts Standards in the review process.